

OVERVIEW OF PIPING PLOVERS ON THE TEXAS COAST: SUMMARY OF DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND HABITAT INFORMATION. Robyn A. Cobb¹, Tom J. Shearer², and Patricia Bacak-Clements³. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, c/o TAMU-CC, 6300 Ocean Drive, USFWS-Unit 5837, Corpus Christi, TX, 78412-5837. ¹Phone: (361) 994-9005; robyn_cobb@fws.gov. ²tom_shearer@fws.gov. ³pat_clements@fws.gov.

The Texas coast supports a large percentage (between 43 and 63%) of Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) during migration or over winter. The amount of Piping Plover habitat along the Texas coast varies according to a number of factors including geography, geology, topography, wind and water movements. The ability of this habitat to sustain plovers is influenced by the degree of public access. Threats to the integrity of this habitat are most pervasive in three geographic regions of the coast where human activity is most concentrated, whereas several barrier islands are by and large protected by virtue of the lack of vehicle access. Coast-wide surveys for wintering plovers are not done annually in Texas. The most comprehensive surveys to date have been the three international censuses. Although long-term survey data is available for two Central coast stretches of Gulf beach, for other parts of the coast, survey information comes from research or monitoring projects that have continued over the course of one to several years. Databases containing Piping Plover sightings information exist at various institutions, but as yet are not integrated, so data is scattered. Although no state agency has ongoing projects or programs for Piping Plovers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) carried out or financially supported numerous research and monitoring efforts in the last 15 years, including compiling an atlas of sightings that occurred between 1992 and 1998. In addition to the TPWD projects, academic institutions, conservation organizations, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) have undertaken research projects and/or monitoring efforts in various regions of the coast. During designation of critical habitat units in Texas, the Service assembled an inclusive list of sources for sightings data. Research and survey projects are currently being proposed for the southern coast of Texas and the Laguna Madre de Tamaulipas, Mexico.